

OPINION

Finding the Right Balance

By HOWARD A. DENIS (R-1)

The County Council has an obligation to preserve and enhance the quality of life for our residents. We must have a sufficient

number of police officers and firefighters to protect our community. We must have the right number of teachers to educate our children. Our public libraries and recreation facilities must be clean and available. Our streets and parks must be properly maintained.

With an uncertain economy, earlier this year the county had put in place midyear budget reductions that hurt. Library hours and staff, social services to our neediest residents, infrastructure maintenance like tree-

trimming and other basic services were cut. The midyear cuts, though painful, put us on better footing as we approach July 1. Even with the newly approved budget, we are not providing the same level of services as we were last year at this time.

Along with these uncertain economic times, we were challenged by decreasing state aid, including aid for school construction and modernization. Four years ago, the county received over \$50 million for school construction and modernization. This year we will get less than \$10 million. This leaves the county with the burden of filling the gap to ensure that schoolchildren receive a quality education.

With this in mind, the County Council faced a monumental challenge: how to sat-



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isfy the needs of our over 900,000 citizens while striking a balance between the services we love and the taxes we hate.

We did that with the balanced budget just adopted. The County Council struck the right

balance. Another example is the Public Library system — a basic public service — which had experienced unfilled positions and cuts in hours. I am very pleased that the Council provided money to fill vacant positions in the library system.

In addition, hours of operation at the heavily used Bethesda, Wheaton, and Gaithersburg regional libraries will be extended.

While not every need was funded, I believe the County Council struck the right balance between the taxes we hate and the services we love.

Howard A. Denis, who comprises over half of our annual operating budget.

Despite substantial losses in state aid, the Council managed to fill the gap and fund projects that enhance the quality of educa-